

Pack Saddle Bridge
(US 283 Pack Saddle Bridge)
North of Roll
Roger Mills/Ellis Countyline
Roger Mills/Ellis Counties
Oklahoma

HAER No. OK-3

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OKLA,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
PACK SADDLE BRIDGE
(US 283 Pack Saddle Bridge)

OK-3

Location: Spanning the South Canadian River 5.5 miles north of Roll, Oklahoma, on the Roger Mills/Ellis Countyline.

UTM Coordinates: Zone 14,
N3968525,E434000 U.S.G.S. Quad: Roll,
Okla. 1968 (7.5')

Date of Construction: 1929 - 1930; Original wood flooring replaced by concrete deck in 1962; north end truss destroyed in 1982 and repaired in 1982; bridge replacement scheduled in 1985.

Present Owner: Oklahoma Department of Transportation
200 Northeast 21st Street
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

Present Use: The Pack Saddle Bridge presently carries vehicular traffic for US 283 highway.

Significance: The US 283 Pack Saddle Bridge has been determined significant since it is Oklahoma's longest through truss bridge (3,810 feet) and is important in commerce for western Oklahoma.

Compiler: Roger S. Saunders, Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

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HISTORICAL WRITTEN NARRATIVE

Present and original physical appearance

Packsaddle was constructed 1929-1930 at a cost of some \$320,000. It is a "through truss" structure, 3,810 feet long, the longest in the state when built and the longest today. It consists of 26 steel trusses, each 144 feet long. These rest on 25 piers and two abutments, all of concrete. Piers rest on bedrock, varying in depth from 17 feet on the south side to 45 feet on the north.

Originally the decking was all wood ... on 6 x 14-inch stringers. Some 350,000 board feet of creosoted timber went into it. (With, for trivia lovers: 200,000 6-penny nails, 15,800 10-pennies, and 6,000 20-pennies). In 1962 a lightweight concrete deck replaced the wood. But the bridge's 20-foot width and 15'6" vertical clearance, alas, is not entirely adequate for today's traffic ... as witness a recent collapse last fall (cf. No. 8) of one span by a truck with an out-size load. However Packsaddle is open once again ... albeit with only 25 through trusses of steel. And surely, in all fairness, this minor - and inadvertent - alteration from the origin - should not be charged against it.

Statement of Significance

Packsaddle is significant architecturally and historically. In design it was, when completed in 1930, the state's longest (3,810 feet) "through truss" bridge. It is still that today. As a matter of fact, few such truss spans of any length remain because restricted vertical clearance will not always accommodate present-day traffic.

In history Packsaddle is significant for the important half-century-plus role it has played in the development of far western Oklahoma. The boon to the transportation field is obvious enough. By joining two ordinary deadend state roads, it made possible creation of US 283 from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. More importantly perhaps, by cutting 100 miles off the nearest route linking the seats of Ellis and Roger Mills Counties, Packsaddle provided both a social and economic link between the northwestern and southwestern sections of the state.

Importance of Packsaddle Bridge to the people of far western Oklahoma can be fully understood only in the context of a relatively isolated frontier setting. This area was Indian reservation until 1892. With white settlement towns sprang up, but they were - and remain today - small and scattered. Old Day County was created to bring government to this corner of Indian Territory. With no consideration of the barrier to travel posed by the Canadian River, it embraced land on both sides of the

river. The situation was not corrected for 15 years. Then, with statehood in 1907, Day was divided into two counties. The barrier, however, remained intact.

Until 1930, crossings of the Canadian between Ellis and Roger Mills counties were laboriously slow and often dangerous. Nearby farmers earned grocery money by hitching horses to the few cars and trucks that happened by, dragging them across the worst spots. Patches of quicksand are notoriously treacherous on the Canadian. Towed vehicles must be kept moving. If allowed to stop the current can wash sand from beneath the wheels, letting a vehicle sink rapidly.

Sources of Information:

National Register of Historic Places, Inventory-Nomination Form, United States Department of the Interior. (For Pack Saddle Bridge.)

Project Information:

The Pack Saddle Bridge is scheduled for replacement in 1985. Construction of the replacement bridge started in 1984 with demolition of the Pack Saddle Bridge scheduled for 1985. The bridge replacement is a project of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation utilizing bridge replacement funds provided by the Federal Highway Administration.

Documentation by:

J. Carl Miller

Oklahoma Department of Transportation

June 1985